

Canine Bulletin

Nebraska Task Force - 1

March 2002

Our first attempt at the advanced test

Submitted by: Monica Barger

After a pretty dull plane ride from Omaha into Sacramento, despite our one hour delay in Denver to change the plane's tires, we arrived in good spirits and were anxious to get out of the airport and relax in our hotel room for a bit. I was glad to see Hershel standing there with a smile, waiting for us as we came through the airport. He ushered us right out the door and directed us to our rental van (ahhh, a VAN!) and we wasted no time heading to our hotel. Upon arriving at the hotel, I went in and made Zima at home and then headed to Hershel's room where we sat and chatted for a bit before heading out for dinner. We talked briefly about the test but I can't really remember what we said as it was all kind of a blur to me. I am sure he coached me on some of the finer points of taking the advanced test...and on where the great bike path was where I could walk my dog while he was away taking his test the next day.



Monica Barger and Zima

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Experience

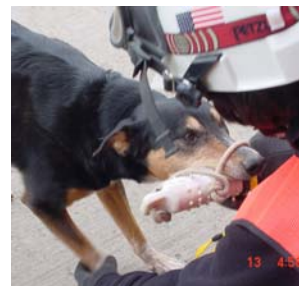
Submitted by: Hershel McAlister

Experience doesn't come without a price. How many times have I heard my Dad say "Son, if you would just pay attention, you could avoid some of that pain." In the back of my mind I was always thinking "are you finished yet, so I can go"!! Well this is a story I feel everyone might want to pay attention to, and possibly avoid some of that pain.

It was February and Max was up for re-certification. This was not his first and I hadn't put much thought into it. We ran a few training drills and he was looking good. Let's do it I thought and what the heck, it's cold here in the Midwest and what could be better than a little mini vacation in California, so off we go. "Let's see, did I get everything: dog, fanny pack, a change or two of clothes, oh almost forgot, the swimsuit!" Day one was looking good. I found a great place to walk, located the test site, now it's time for some R & R! Day two, Monica fly's in, we checked out the hiking trail, experienced some of California's many restaurants and even talked about a few search strategies. Day three, here comes the experience thing, so if you were daydreaming up till now, you might want to listen up. I left for the test and arrived early. I thought to myself, "so far so good, let's take the

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Olympic K-9's



Ditto & Elaine Sawtell



Zima



Deborah Goodman & One Soc



Louie

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When we got back to the hotel, we found a few other dog handlers in the parking lot. They were from WA and I had gone to the FEMA school with one of them, Jane, who was also attempting her first advanced test on Sunday. We chatted a while and they got into asking Hershel a lot of questions and I found myself getting nervous listening to it all, so Zima and I left and went for a walk around the beautiful motel grounds. I could tell Zima was a bit "flat" from our travel and not quite up to par (which more than likely meant that I wasn't quite up to par) and I made a mental note to give her some good play time to try to maintain as normal a schedule as possible for her for the next couple of days. I ended my evening by wishing Hershel luck and retiring to my room fairly early that night before the phone calls started. "This is Hershel...do you have some knee pads?" yep, you can use my knee pads Hershel...ring ring..."this is Hershel...do the building markings include the box or is that something the other team members do?" It's something the engineers do Hershel. Okay.. thanks.. goodnight" Good night...and goodluck!

Saturday dawned a beautiful sunny day, with temps around the 40's. I woke up about 9 our time, 7 CA time, and took my time lazing in bed with my dog, showering and getting ready for my day. My friend from San Francisco was driving up to meet me and we were going to spend the day together...she has a Zima daughter and we decided to take the dogs to the nearby bike trail and let them run and swim and play in the river. I thought that would be a good "down time" activity for Zima to relax

her before our test. I went to breakfast with the gals from WA and we all shared our nerves about the test and had a few good laughs, trying to take the edge off. We all wondered how Hershel was doing!

My friend arrived around noon and after a quick lunch, we headed to the bike path. We spent about 3 hours walking and talking and letting the dogs play, fetch sticks and swim. It was very nice to take my mind off the test, though I still wondered how Hershel was doing! After our walk, she headed home and I went back to the motel room to wait to hear from Hershel as we were going to go to dinner with Fred and Cathi Pitts that night (Fred has a type 1 cattle dog and was an evaluator at my test...what better way to rub elbows with an evaluator???). I fell asleep waiting to hear from him and when the phone rang, it roused me from a deep sleep and I heard Herhsel say "we didn't do very well" I responded with a slightly incoherent..."oh...okay" and then he said, "did you hear what I said" I realized I must have missed something and forced myself to wake up a little more and really listen and he repeated, "we didn't do very well" My heart sank! I asked him what happened and listened to his story and told him I was sorry. We decided to go to dinner with a big group of people from the test and most of the evaluators that night. I felt bad for Hershel, but I tried to keep my mind on my dog and what she needed to be in top form the next day.

I slept very fitfully Saturday night, waking every couple of hours, anxious and full of energy. I can't say

I was nervous...I don't tend to get nervous at tests because either my dog and I are ready or we're not. Either we pass or we don't...there's nothing I can do about it at that point and if we don't pass, we just go home and do some more training, so I can happily say that my nerves for the test were pretty calm, but I was anxious to get going and get on with it. Hershel drove with me to our first staging area which was a parking lot across the street from the test site. I sat and talked to an old friend who I hadn't seen for a couple of years (who happened to be testing his dog in my group that day) and then we went across the street and restaged in the entrance to the site. We couldn't see the piles, of course, and Hershel left me to go down to get a better vantage point to watch our test. I laughed at the other guy, Peter, who was in our group testing with us. I told him he needed some Prozac or something...he was literally bouncing and jumping around and talking like an old 45 record that was played on high speed.

The 4 wheelers came and the guy told me to follow him. I followed him down a hill and around a bunch of junk piles to a wood pile. It was filled with lots of small pieces of wood, packed down tight, didn't look too tough. I was scoping out the site as much as I could on my drive down. I got out and met my three evaluators at that pile and had to wait for my brief. We flowed quickly through the briefing and I got Zima out, let her potty, walked to the base of the pile where I would have to remain until she alerted and sent her on her search. I didn't know how much time had passed, but she

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dog for a walk, and get that out of the way.” I then checked my watch “Forty minutes to go, now what”? A nap sounds good, what else? Mistake #1, what should I have been doing? How about going over a check list (what check list? Mistake #2) which I should have put together before I left home, right? So hopefully you are asking, “what would I have written if I had put one together? This is where you get involved, so as you continue to read on (and I hope you do), I want you to make your own checklist, and we will compare notes.

Suddenly a guy on a 4 wheeler pulls up and says follow me. “That’s easy enough,” I thought. Pile #1 of 3 was full access - if you could get around in it that is! It was full of huge pipes and believe me, they were not the kind you just hop around on. I thought to myself “no problem, that’s Max’s job, right!” Max decided he would do a perimeter search first, he’s no fool. I later learned he was one of the few that did that. Well it wasn’t long I heard his first bark. I waited, for more barks, two more came with long pauses between each. I started thinking, “what’s up with that?” I quickly looked at the area and began to second-guess; mistake #3. Having evaluated a few tests myself, I did some more thinking, looking and second-guessing. Now from where I stood, there wasn’t anyway that someone could be under there. I know what you are thinking, so keep on thinking it, and ingrain it in your mind, and then write it on your forehead; Trust Your Dog!! Scent work is your dogs job not yours. Your job is to stand around and look good; I wasn’t even doing that at this point. I told the evaluator that it must have been residual scent from the last round. My logic was that there was a large culvert pipe sitting on end with no cover. I figured they had hid someone in it during the last round and had just moved the victim on to another area. Since Max had not done his usual aggressive bark, it all made sense plus no one could have possibly

been hiding under there, so we moved on. There ended up being two more victims, and Max found them all. I called two, and he called three, mistake #4! Now we are off towards pile #2. This pile is full of wood and has no access. Lucky for Max, I don’t think he could afford much more of my help. He did his first bark, finally a second bark and then a third. We were off to claim our find. I re-sent Max from that spot. It wasn’t long and he had one more. We called this pile early and I am starting to feel a little better despite the weak barks. Now, we head for pile #3. I am starting to run the math that’s four victims found as I see it, and due to my quick thinking, we avoided a false alert on pile #1. “Boy Max, are you lucky that you had me along?” Pile #3 was perimeter pile and also had the distraction as well as those

dreaded map markings. (By the way, did I mention that I never reviewed them!) - mistake #5. Well as we head out I’m thinking “there are two in here and it’s large enough to have at least that”. Max is working and working, I am beginning to notice some fatigue, mistake #6. Your dog has to be in good shape. I will not take full blame for this because we do walk two miles on days that I am home. The only reason I mentioned that is because it’s not enough. Did we all hear that?? I almost forgot to mention that the temperature was in the mid 60’s to low 70’s. It was also windy, by the looks of my hair that evening, I would say some where around 25 – 30 mph. Actually, the wind was closer to 10 – 12 mph.

Max is finally starting to show interest in an area, but he is not willing to commit. “What’s up with that” I inwardly start to panic. He leaves and my mind begins to really shift gears. We need two more victims’ with a minimum of one to pass. He hasn’t missed one before now, so it must be a distraction. I better get with the program because were now running out of time! Max is now at the other end of the pile and starting to show



Hershel McAlister & Max

“Ingrain it in your mind, and then write it on your forehead: Trust Your Dog!! Scent work is your dogs job not yours.”

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seemed pretty quick when I heard her start barking. I called an alert and climbed up the pile and there she was staring at a spot on the pile, doing her nice little alert. I walked over, praised her (didn't reward her with anything), petted her and tied my tape on a piece of wood near the spot. I regrouped, gave Zima her second search command and after traversing the pile in a natural grid pattern, she alerted a second time and I felt very good about her work on that pile. She was clean, efficient and very focused and fast. I sent her over one area we had not covered very well and then I called the pile 11 minutes into the search. Again, we quickly debriefed, I drew my map, did my follow up recommendations, checked my dog and headed for the second pile. The 2nd pile was a mix of small and large pieces of wood and brush. It was a perimeter/high point pile. I sent Zima and she topped the pile with me climbing up behind her to the perimeter. I could see her fairly well and she alerted fairly quickly on the second pile and I marked my victim location. I resent her and she cruised over the North end of the pile and I saw her stop and sniff an area, then stick her head in and I saw her sides suck in...she was sniffing HARD...I KNEW it was a distraction...I quietly told her to leave it and she gave me that normal "ahhh mom!" look and moved on. On the South end of the pile, there was a man with a running chain saw. I called Zima to that area to search a little "island" type piece of the pile and every time she approached that man, he'd rev that chain saw. After about the third time of that, Zima had had enough and began circling him with her hair up, barking at him. It wasn't a fearful bark, it was a VERY annoyed bark. It was very funny! When I called her and resent her to work, she went right back to work. On that pile she kept stopping and staring at me...I didn't like it. I kept resending her to a particular area I felt we had not covered and she kept going part way out and



Top: Monica and Zima in Salt Lake City
Bottom: Monica in Salt Lake City

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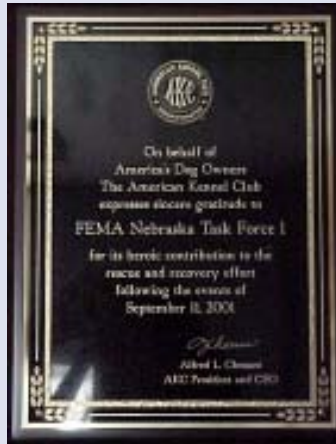
coming back. The wind was towards her, so I should have realized that she HAD covered the area...four times already. I saw her drive diminishing and her energy going down. I knew she was getting tired and every time I sent her to another area of that pile, it dropped even more. I finally called that pile as well.

Onto our third pile. The third pile was a total access pile, but it was very sneaky of them as it was made of very large circular culvert tubes that were extremely difficult for us to access. I took Zima around and started her on the far South end of the pile as the wind was blowing out of the North towards us. I released her on command and reached to put my leash around my neck, looked up and she was gone...and barking somewhere in the bottom of the pile. I was still on the ground, around the perimeter of that pile, so I started trying to follow her barking to find her. I couldn't find her anywhere and I had to climb up the pile and look, then climb back down and she continued her alert the whole time. I was pretty sure she had gotten into the victim as her alert was

VERY serious and continued for a very long time. I finally saw a tube way underneath where she had crawled in and marked that as my victim location. I think we must have wasted 10 min. on that part of the pile. I took her out and then felt lost as to where we were, where we'd been and what she'd covered thus far. I decided to do a perimeter search, so walked her around the North end of the pile and took her up to the middle of the pile. She was pretty hot and tired by then, so I gave her a drink just as they called 5 minutes. I knew we were under a time crunch then...I glanced around at the evaluators and sent Zima in the direction they were centered around. She went over, sniffed the area, came back a little, went back to the original area and then she lifted her nose and her ears fell

Token of Appreciation

In January of this year NE-TF1 received a letter and a plaque of appreciation from The American Kennel Club. The letter read: as an organization devoted to the welfare and advancement of purebred dogs in the United States, we were particularly touched by the heroic efforts of the canine search and rescue teams and the groups that supported them in the aftermath of September 11, 2001. Nothing could better demonstrate the depth of the human-canine bond than your actions during those difficult times. Thank you again, and God bless America.



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interest. "It is a perimeter pile Hershel, so get down there"!! I say to myself. We are off and running. He barks, not solid, but I'm getting used to that. I reward, and they tell me I have one min. to go. I decide to call it. Now for the debrief, mistake #6. I am not even going to tell you how much I impressed them with my ability to make and explain marking, and they wanted them all! I don't mean just the "X" either. You are probably saying to yourself, "We never do that and won't do it on a real deployment either". That's not the point. They want it, so do it. We represent more than ourselves here and for that I feel really bad, but it's a "done deal". Let's make me the last one that does that. Well it is over as far as the test goes. Now it's time to wait until the last rotation, and then they give the results. I decided to watch the other handlers sweat for awhile, when all of a sudden I saw something I didn't like - two different dogs barking at that area Max only showed interest in (not the one he barked at). I later found out that Max was barking at a cooked chicken wrapped in a dirty shirt. He probably figured if I wasn't going to reward for a person, maybe, just maybe I would reward for a little human scent and (a chicken) and guess what, I did! Why did he not bark at the live victim? I don't know, but I hope I can correct that problem before it reoccurs.

So you have probably figured it out by now. Max barked at five victims plus one distraction. I called four victims and one distraction. We returned home the same way we came, with the acceptance of some valuable lessons relearned. In my case I should have never let myself get so lax not only in my training, but in the preparation involved before a test. Not only did it cost the team an unneeded expense, it gave us a black eye. Yes, over time black eyes clear up, but it could have been avoided, and from personal experience I know we have one of the best disaster teams out there. It did not come without a price, and I hope we all not only learn from the mistakes that I made, but remember them as well. Don't let yourself be reminded like I was

How Do I Submit Items for the Canine Bulletin

Mail, E-mail, or Fax items to:

Julie Marget
Lincoln Fire & Rescue
1801 "Q" Street
Lincoln, NE 68508
jmarget@ci.lincoln.ne.us
Fax: 441-8292
Phone: 441-8352

Address/
Phone #
Changes Also
contact Julie



Mail your
training logs to:
Sandy Yost
1801 "Q" Street
Lincoln, NE 68508

about things we already know. Like my Dad said, "you don't have to make all the mistakes yourself". "You could pay attention, and avoid a few".

In closing, Monica and Zima worked like a team should. They truly made Lincoln look good! I only wish I could say the same.

First attempt continued from page 4

back and I knew she had scent. I was really anxious at that point because I knew we'd found 4 victim locations so far and she'd have to find at least one more to pass and of course, I wanted both of the others! She seemed to pause and look at me...and I thought..."no, I am NOT helping you find that victim...YOU do it!" I dropped my face so she couldn't see it and ignored her. About 10 seconds later she started to alert. I called the alert and moved across the pile as quickly as I could and tied my marker. I turned around to resend Zima once more and they called time on the pile. My lack of clear thinking on that pile almost cost us the certification. How could I have gotten so lost up there?

Despite Hershel's support that we did a good job, I wasn't sure if we had passed or not. That's one thing I've learned...don't ever second guess it because you might end up surprised. I told myself to just wait and see and not to get my hopes up. I didn't have to wait long as Zima and I were the first names they called when they were handing out the certifications.

When I received my evaluations in the mail, I was surprised to find that most of the comments about Zima and I, had to do with me helping my dog more. They thought I needed to help her more. I know what they mean, but by the same token, I am very pleased to know that we were not one of the USAR K9 teams that encouraged my dog's alerts, nor helped her find the victims. She did the scent work, I did the human work and we made a good team.

The lessons I took away from that test are that you have to be mentally tough and prepared for the advanced test. Your dog has to have mental and physical stamina for the test and you'd better whole heartedly understand the wind, how to use it to your dog's advantage and how to mentally map out a rubble pile so you know where you've been, where you haven't and what your dog has covered just by way of the wind direction. If your dog says there's no one there, believe them, but know what your dog does when there's no one there so you can recognize it! Watch your dog for diminishing energy and drive and give them whatever they need to maintain their search stamina. Don't be afraid to call a pile early if you feel comfortable that your dog has done its job well on that pile. Stand up for what you know is right when working your dog...do not be intimidated by your evaluators as they will be testing you on your ability to do what is right for you and your dog, despite pressure to do otherwise. You MUST have good directions on your dog to be successful on the advanced piles. They are a necessity far more than you ever experience in the basic test.

Deployment Order

1. Monica Barger, Type 1
2. Amy Rising, Type 1
3. Elaine Sawtell, Type 1
4. Hershel McAlister, Type 2
5. Deborah Goodman, Type 2

Olympic K-9's



Ditto, Zima, Louie, and One Soc in Salt Lake City



From left to right: Dwayne Koranda, Mike Agnew, Jim George, Kevin McCoy, Elaine Sawtell, Deborah Goodman, Monica Barger, Amy Rising, Ditto, One Soc, Zima, and Louie



Louie & Zima